

A photograph of a classroom scene. In the foreground, a female teacher with blonde hair, wearing a white face mask and a grey cardigan, is leaning over a desk. She is looking down at a young Black female student. The student is wearing a blue face mask with a colorful unicorn pattern and a grey sweatshirt. She is looking up at the teacher. In the background, other students are seated at desks, also wearing masks. The classroom has a chalkboard and some colorful decorations on the wall.

# **SAFE SCHOOLS, SUCCESSFUL STUDENTS**

## **Addendum: A Plan for 2021**

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December 18, 2020







## Message from Deputy Leader & Education Critic Sarah Hoffman

In July, we released our Safe Schools, Successful Students plan to get our schools ready for the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. We proposed 15 concrete recommendations that were informed by the feedback of nearly 14,000 Albertans. We had one goal in mind: safe student learning.

Unfortunately, the UCP government rejected the majority of our recommendations, including a provincewide cap of 15 students per classroom. We maintain this recommendation, although ambitious, was achievable with a combination of funding the hiring of new teachers and using space vacated during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as post-secondary classrooms.

As we enter the holiday season, Alberta has been hit hard by the second wave of the pandemic. Case counts have skyrocketed, and our schools have suffered. As of December 17, it has been reported that more than 1,000 schools have had cases of COVID-19 since August 30 and almost 600 of those were in the last two weeks.

It was a lack of decisive action over the summer by Premier Jason Kenney and Education Minister Adriana LaGrange that forced the closure of junior high and high schools after 12 weeks of classes. It is highly likely

Alberta's case numbers will be significantly higher in January than they were in September. Students should not be forced out of their classrooms again in 2021.

To keep students learning safely in schools in 2021, the UCP government must learn from its mistakes.

With in-person school learning delayed until January 11, now is the time for the government to take steps to ensure schools are safer when students return.

As we said over the summer, ensuring students, staff and families are safe should not be a partisan issue. It is in that spirit that we are putting forward this addendum to our Safe Schools, Successful Students plan. We propose four concrete recommendations that will help schools reopen — and stay open — in 2021.

There is light at the end of the tunnel, but there are many more difficult months ahead. The decisions the government takes this December are critical. The goal must be safe learning experiences for students, staff, families and communities.

Sincerely,  
**- Sarah Hoffman**

Deputy Leader of the NDP Official Opposition

# Guiding Principles

## Summer 2020

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**Students and staff safety must be the top priority.** While staff care deeply about their students and careers, they should not have their safety — or well-being of their families — compromised. Parents deserve to feel confident that their kids are safe and cared for at school.

Student learning must continue. Students deserve a world-class education system that helps them find their passion, share their personalities, and foster the skills they need to confront the challenges of a fast-changing world.

Public health officials must feel supported and respected by all orders of government in protecting students, staff, families, and all Albertans. Local decision makers need to feel supported in addressing local pressures and health concerns.

# Consultation & Engagement

## Fall 2020

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Over the summer, Alberta's NDP Official Opposition gathered feedback from Albertans on ways to support a safe reopening of our province's schools. Nearly 14,000 Albertans engaged in this conversation with us, which resulted in our Safe Schools, Successful Students plan.

Over the fall and early winter, we continued to engage Albertans regarding school safety. Thousands of Albertans, including students, families, and staff expressed significant concerns about their experiences this fall. The overall message we heard was loud and clear: staff and students who choose to return to in-class learning in 2021 need to be safe. The December 2020 Addendum to the Safe Schools, Successful Students plan reflects recommendations that could be implemented in short order, and likewise reflects our continued engagement with Albertans.



# Recommendations

## Addendum December 2020

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### **1 DEDICATED SCHOOL CONTACT TRACING TEAM**

Hire 160 full-time equivalent positions to conduct contact tracing exclusively for schools, to ensure that exposed staff and students can be contacted immediately and isolate to keep schools safe and open.

**Cost: \$4.8 Million**

### **2 HIRE ADDITIONAL EDUCATIONAL STAFF**

Schools should get funding to hire additional qualified teachers and educational assistants who are willing to work in Alberta schools. Increased infection rates and mandatory isolation have dramatically increased demand for educational staff, but districts do not have sufficient resources to hire them. This results in either larger or cancelled classes, and additional disruptions to student learning. We are proposing a five per cent increase to the base instructional grant for the remainder of the school year.

**Cost: \$196.6 Million**

### **3 PROVIDE RAPID TESTING FOR SYMPTOMATIC STAFF**

Rapid testing means symptomatic staff can be isolated quickly and slow the spread of COVID. We recommend procuring just over 100,000 additional rapid tests, and distributing them to school districts experiencing staffing pressures.

**Cost: \$9.7 Million**

### **4 CREATE THE ALBERTA LEARN FROM HOME FUND**

Parents have contacted us raising concerns about their inability to secure the additional supports for remote home learning. Other jurisdictions, including Ontario, have created a program to offset some of the related family expenses. Alberta families who have spent at least two months learning from home during the 2020-2021 school year would receive \$500 per student, and \$750 per student with special needs.

**Cost: \$73.6 Million**

**TOTAL COST: \$284.7 Million**